

2008 Images for Conservation (ICF) Pro Photo Tour

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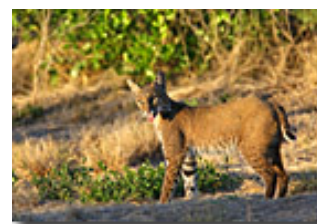
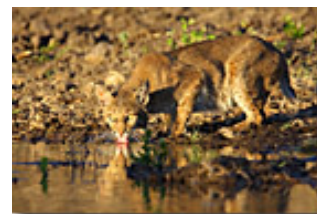
The Encounter

It was around 4:30 p.m. with temperatures well into the upper nineties when I ran into the ranch owner on my way to the blind. He questioned me briefly about the amount of water I was carrying. I guess my response was reassuring because he responded with a quick "good luck" before disappearing into the gut-wrenching haze. I was on day ten of the ICF (Images for Conservation) Pro Photo Tour in the Rio Grande Valley of southern Texas. As the result of a double-blind drawing, I was assigned to spend the next 30 days (the entire month of April, 2008) on a 3,095-acre ranch in Duval County. According to the ranch foreman, Juan, it had not rained on this ranch since the previous September. Since the water cycle seemed to have been stuck on a phase other than precipitation, the ranch owners, Tim and Juan, had been filling the three small ponds artificially with a hose from a two hundred and seventy foot well.

The first nine days of the tournament had provided a suitable array of subjects, but there was still one species that I had failed to encounter. It was the species that was ranked number one on my list to see, but to better yet photograph. My previous scouting trips had confirmed my assumption that this would be a good place to set up my equipment and wait. I now sat in the center of a very rudimentary hide (or blind) that was located on the edge of small pond. On the opposite end from where I sat were four distinct prints. The foreprints and hindprints were about the same size, two inches (50 mm) long and slightly longer than wide with 4 toes and no claw marks. The heal pad was lobed at rear and concave at the front. I really didn't need the extra information that the heal pad provided, but it told me without a doubt that I found (well almost), what I was looking for.

As I sat in the center of the blind, I began to question myself as to why I would come so early in the afternoon. I had already spent four hours sitting in this exact spot some six hours ago trying to photograph my nemesis during the semi-cool hours of the morning. I normally wouldn't have returned for my evening shoot until around 5:30 or 6 p.m., but this day was different. Just how it was different, I had yet to find out. It was now about a quarter past five and I began daydreaming as I waited in my miniature, camouflaged chair with my left leg draped casually over my right. By this time, I had actually taken off my hat in an effort to cool myself. Not wanting a scorpion or western diamondback to take refuge under my hat, I decided to place it over my camera. Though I was daydreaming with my legs crossed and hat over my camera, I still had my eyes trained on the edge of the brush just above the prints. By this time, my thoughts were somewhere in between how many different slices of cold-cut meat I would be adding to my sub sandwich that I would be consuming after the sun had fallen below the horizon and which episode of *Survivorman* I had last watched. All of a sudden, something caught my attention out of the right side of my peripheral vision. I turned my head slowly and trained my focus to no more than thirty meters away and there it was, *Lynx rufus*, or more commonly known as the bobcat. I now had a dilemma. Considering the relaxed position I was in, I had to act quickly without drawing attention to this wild cat that was staring directly at me.

After repositioning the tripod-mounted camera and myself, I got off a grand total of nine shots before she withdrew herself from the situation. Although the actual images turned out to be mediocre due to the rather harsh lighting at 5:30 pm, the experience of scouting and waiting countless hours to successfully find and photograph a wild bobcat left me dripping with pure adrenaline and utter excitement. At least now I was 100 percent confident that there were bobcats showing up at this watering hole. My persistence paid off as the bobcat showed up again three days later at a more suitable hour for photography (7:30 p.m.). The second encounter resulted in well over 150 total images, with about half of them being usable.



More on the ICF Pro Photo Tour

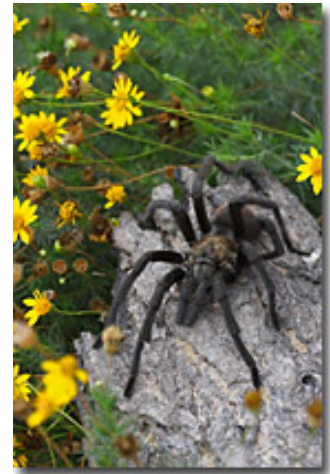
The key objective for the photographers of the ICF Pro Tour is to assemble a portfolio consisting of five categories (Birds, Mammals, Reptiles, Amphibians and Fish, Invertebrates, and Plants and Landscapes) of your best images. Only limited (contrast & saturation) global post-processing can be done with maximum of 10 percent cropping. The only cloning accepted is that of dust spots. (The rules and regulations are modified slightly from year to year).

"The primary purpose of The Pro-Tour is to plan, develop, and promote the Private Lands Nature Photo Tourism Industry. The intent of the competition is to produce the finest photographs that convey the value of nature, the importance of habitat conservation and the creation of regional biological inventories." – Images for Conservation Fund

I would like to give a special thanks to Jim and Donna Erhardt for sponsoring me for the 2008 ICF Pro-Photo Tour. It was a wonderful experience that I would not hesitate to participate in again. More images from the competition can be found at <http://www.joshuaandersonphotography.com/TexasGalleryICF2008.html>.

For more information on the Images For Conservation Fund, please visit their website, www.imagesforconservation.org.

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Joshua Anderson developed an interest in photography in the mid 1990's while attending Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Joshua and his wife, Kristy, reside in southern Ohio and are avid adventure travelers. More of Joshua's photography can be seen at his website, www.joshuaandersonphotography.com.

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